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DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS TO NSC - DAMON WILSON

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SUBJECT: THE RIGHT ON WHAT'S WRONG WITH ORBAN

REF: BUDAPEST 2048 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: POL/C ERIC V. GAUDIOSI; REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (SBU) Ambassador Foley's dinner for visiting Hungarian-American Coalition President Maximilian Teleki highlighted questions, concerns, and criticism regarding FIDESZ leader Viktor Orban from traditional supporters.

¶2. (C) Center-right commentator Istvan Stumpf candidly noted that "Viktor has made so many big mistakes" in the past year, particularly in losing the national elections in April and in failing to reach an accommodation with the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) in order to unite the opposition. Many see his subsequent tactics, including reftel calls for a "government of experts," as directed toward the fundamental goal of avenging his electoral loss whatever the consequences. Although Stumpf minimized constitutional questions surrounding the proposal, he flatly stated that the idea has "no chance" of success.

¶3. (C) Orban's decision not to speak in Parliament and then to send demonstrators home after the confidence vote October 6 remains unexplained and to many inexplicable. Anita Orban (no relation), Director of the International Center for Democratic Transition (ICDT), commented that she "knew all along" the demonstration would be "a bust" because the FIDESZ leadership is "full of hot air." Indeed, Friday's crowds, estimated at 70,000, fell far short of FIDESZ's pre-parliamentary debate prediction of 300,000. Our sources across the political spectrum tell us that in years past Orban could have drawn far more people with far less effort.

¶4. (C) Anita Orban continued that FIDESZ's claims to have won a "historic victory" in the October 1 local elections were right, but for the wrong reasons. She believes the election results will usher in a new generation of party leaders with independent power bases but a vested interest in cooperating with the central government to ensure access to funding - particularly given reports from academic observers regarding FIDESZ's large campaign debts. She believes this trend will ultimately make FIDESZ "a bottom-up rather than a top-down party."

¶5. (C) Stumpf agreed, noting that "October 2" would have been the best time for Orban to move on, thus allowing FIDESZ to make a clean break. As it stands now, Stumpf believes Orban may never again be FIDESZ's candidate for Prime Minister. Although he might be better suited to the Presidency, which would give him more rhetorical than practical responsibility, Stumpf suggested, perhaps the best place for him might be Brussels, where his role in the European Peoples' Party (EPP) could be used to move him from the domestic political spotlight.

¶6. (C) Others within FIDESZ agree. Debrecen Mayor Lajos Kosa has candidly indicated his interest in "replacing Orban

as John Major replaced Margaret Thatcher," emphasizing the importance of being seen as Orban's heir rather than his deposer given his personal following.

¶7. (C) In the meantime, some in the party are keeping their distance from Orban. FIDESZ insiders have commented that Orban's recent appearances have been without the party leadership arrayed behind him, and reports of serious disagreements within the party regarding the protests continue. His recent appearances in an armored-plated SUV with German plates, reportedly provided by an unnamed donor in Germany, have also raised eyebrows.

¶8. (C) Comment: Orban's demise has been often predicted but never realized. Political analyst Krisztian Szabados compares Orban to a rock star whose fan base "will accept wild inconsistency as long as he's not boring." Even Deputy Minister of Culture and Education Katalin Bogjai admits that her mother "prayed for Orban." As she noted, he has always given rise to animosity or adoration but never ambivalence. "To be either the Messiah or the Devil," she concluded, "is not good for him ... and not healthy for Hungary." End Comment.

FOLEY